

How bad do things have to get before someone says “enough is enough”? Despite the contrary popular belief, an addict doesn’t need to hit rock bottom before he or she finally quits; but, everyone will reach a breaking point—a sort of eye-opening moment or event that causes a person to seek treatment. Some people will reach this point much more quickly than others.

Nigel sees cocaine for what it really is

“You believe that coke will increase your perceptions, that it will allow you to surpass yourself, that you will be able to control things. It’s bloody nonsense. After a while you don’t pay your bills anymore, you don’t wash yourself anymore, you give up your friends, your family. You will become defenseless and alone.”

Ana realizes her addiction isn’t just affecting her...

“I’ll never forget: one day my brother had brought all his stuffed animals into the bathtub with him, and he was washing them furiously. My mom asked him what he was doing and he said ‘I want them all to get clean. I want them to get clean like Ana’s getting clean.’ He would also draw signs with crayons that said, ‘No Drugs Allowed.’ They had pictures of skulls and crossbones and needles on them, things no kids should know how to draw. He’d put them on the door of his room. At some point I finally realized that my addiction wasn’t just screwing me up; it was screwing him up too.”

Carrie’s drug dealer told her she was “too high maintenance”

“My skin was pale grey, my pupils perpetually dilated. I was jittery, my mannerisms were spastic, my dialogue was jumpy and curse-laden. I was calling [my dealer] all the time. And finally, after a month, he told me I was too high maintenance and never to bother him again. I had been fired by my drug dealer.”

But because of the network of dealers she had become acquainted with, Carrie had no problem finding more of the drug. At one point, she was using so much that she would have two to three dealers coming to her house on a daily basis because one would sell her as much as they could, and then when she ran out, she’d just call the next in line.

Eventually, her paranoia got so bad that she stopped leaving her apartment and basically shut everyone out of her life—friends, family, *everyone*.

“My body started to deteriorate. My skin bruised easily from lack of sleep and I had deep circles under my eyes. My hands and feet swelled to the size of balloons. Once, I mistakenly applied pink nail polish under my eyes thinking it was concealer...

“I’d stay awake for days at a time, sometimes for a full week. I never ate when I was using, and I drank only alcohol—water, juice, and pop made me sick. I guzzled olive oil for calories, and sometimes, to clear my clogged sinuses, I would drink Frank’s RedHot straight out of the bottle. It burned my mouth and eyes, but the shock would do the trick: I could stop blowing my nose and blow lines instead.

“By this time I weighed 102 pounds. I kept thinking that I would spontaneously return to my previous self—when I was using less—when I felt validated and happy when my life seemed exciting and glamorous...

“My paranoia descended into full-fledged psychosis. I suspected that everyone was on drugs—my neighbours, the concierge in my building, the barista at Starbucks. I saw men pointing machine guns at me from the shadows in the corner of my living room.

“When I watched TV, I thought the shows were trying to tell me something: characters on a kids’ cartoon would say ‘Jump!’ and I would jump; they would say ‘Touch your nose,’ and I’d touch my nose.

“One day, a dealer I was seeing told me to go out on the balcony of my condo— that a plane was coming to save me from this hell I was living. I gingerly made my way to the balcony and slid open the door, wanting to make him happy. I stepped into the cool night air and tried to climb over the railing. As I started my descent, he screamed, and rushed outside and grabbed me: he’d told me no such thing. I had hallucinated the conversation...”

Crack Addict Stories—Sacrificing Everything for the High

Shawne sees her acquaintances surrender their self-respect in order to sustain their cocaine addictions

“Don’t touch cocaine. I spent two years in jail because of this drug. And when I got out, life was so hard I started taking the drug again. I know ten girls who became prostitutes because

of coke. It's much more extreme and degrading than we believe. At the time we don't realize to what degree it destroys us."

When 'Jessie' lost her best friend because of her cocaine addiction, she knew something had to change

"I got into cocaine at parties. At first, it was for fun. Then I kept taking it because it gave me energy and made me feel strong and confident. It gave me good feelings inside, but it made me act like a real jerk to everyone else, and I didn't see it. I started to get edgy and impatient and got into fights with friends for no good reason. I ended two relationships and lost my best friend that way."

Losing that friend finally made me stop and look at what a mess my life had become. I called a crisis hotline, and they got me an appointment at a women's counseling center in town."

Ana's cocaine abuse takes a toll on her health...and more

"At first I loved cocaine... At the time, it seemed like the cocaine was making me a better person. Romantic rumors of Jack Kerouac using speed to write 'On The Road,' and other creatives and visionaries made my addiction seem excusable to me. There was absolutely no way in hell I would stop.

"I had no idea that my drug use would end up wreaking havoc on me both physically and mentally, and I had no idea that cocaine would take away my friends, my health, and my independence.

“Eventually, things began to spiral out of control. I had sore throats every night; it felt like I had a constant case of strep throat. I weighed about 90 pounds. I couldn’t eat anything but smoothies (yes, I considered drinking smoothies eating). I would get nosebleeds randomly in the middle of the day. I had ulcers. It felt as if I had the flu all the time, but coke would subdue the symptoms. I was falling apart. I remember there was one night when I couldn’t go to sleep because I was too high. I didn’t want to do coke at that point, but I felt like I had to. It was 2 AM and I wanted more than anything to go to sleep, but instead I went into the bathroom and did a bump of coke. I’d do a bump every half hour or so, pacing myself; just doing enough to feel normal. It wasn’t fun anymore. A bump every half hour—that was me trying to feel sober.”

Carrie’s dad forces her to make a choice: get help or be homeless

“By the time I was 30, in 2010, I was on my fourth stint in rehab...

“The turning point came in January 2011 when I had [8 ball of coke](#). On New Year’s Eve, I got so high on booze and coke that I ran into oncoming traffic on Eglinton. A taxi slammed the brakes but still hit me, and when the driver rushed out to check on me, I punched him and blacked out. Apparently, he called the police.

“I woke up hours later in a hospital room, handcuffed to a gurney, my legs in iron cuffs, surrounded by my father and a few police officers. I had no idea what had happened, but they filled me in. I passed out again after a few minutes and woke up in my apartment. The police had released me from custody, and my dad had driven me home. The next day he

came to my place and gave me two options: I could either live sober in the apartment he paid for, or I could sleep on the streets.”

Not All Cocaine Addiction Stories Have to End the Same Way

If a [crack cocaine](#) addict does not seek out help, he or she is headed down a path that will only end in premature death, jails, or institutions. No matter how far gone someone may seem, there is *a/ways* time to get him or her off that path. Sometimes, it takes a little inspiration, some motivation, for a person to gather up the courage to seek treatment. If a cocaine addict hears one or two cocaine addiction stories that are either similar or hopefully, much worse than his or her own story so far, these stories can provide some much-needed reassurance that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

‘Jessie’ is learning better ways to deal with stress now that she is in treatment

“The center [I chose to go to for treatment] gave me a lot of help. They introduced me to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. They talked me through withdrawal symptoms when I was first getting off cocaine. They got me to a doctor’s checkup to make sure my body was working OK after the cocaine abuse and withdrawal. They introduced me to a drug counselor who ran support groups and met with people one-on-one.

“One-on-one counseling was the most helpful for me. For a few months, I saw my counselor once or twice a week. Now I check in twice a month, to tell her how I’m doing.

“Counseling let me see myself in a new way. I realized that feeling bad about myself made me want to use. When I was sad or angry, I’d try to erase those feelings with cocaine. My counselor helped me learn to recognize when I’m stressed out, and do things to help myself feel better. She taught me the initials ‘HALT’: ‘H’ for ‘hungry,’ ‘A’ for ‘angry,’ ‘L’ for ‘lonely,’ and ‘T’ for ‘tired.’ When you’re feeling any of those things, you’re more in danger of slipping up and using drugs to try to feel better. So the best thing to do is ‘halt’: stop what you’re doing and take care of yourself right away—get something to eat, blow off some steam, find someone to talk to, or get some rest.

“Once, I relapsed after I ran into my old dealer. ‘It was just an accident,’ I told my counselor. ‘I ran into him on the way to the store.’ But my counselor saw my denial and gave me a reality check. ‘Why the store in his neighborhood?’ she asked me. I realized that I went there to tempt myself into using. Now I know not to go to that neighborhood anymore.”

Ana is free to pursue her dreams thanks to her sobriety

Ana started doing cocaine because of the pressure she felt to do well in school. She was able to multi-task like never before and felt that the high made her more creative.

“At the beginning, the coke made me feel really social, but eventually it isolated me from everyone. None of my friends did coke as much as I did; my use became taboo and I began to hide it. I was even able to hide it from my therapist. I developed a good relationship with my drug dealer for whom I’d do favors in exchange for money or more cocaine. I’d transport drugs to upstate New York and leave them with

another dealer, which enabled me to maintain my expensive new habit. At the worst of it, when I was 18, I was blowing 1.5 to 2 grams a day. That sounds completely crazy to me today; I can barely drink coffee anymore.

“Finally I couldn’t do it anymore. I knew if I went any further down this road, I wouldn’t be able to turn around. So one night I went into the kitchen with a Glad Tupperware container filled with \$800 worth of coke. I plopped it down on the counter in front of my mom and just said, ‘Mom, I need help.’ It was the freest I’d felt in six months, ‘I’m doing coke all the time now, and I need help.’

“I told my mom the whole story. My mom and dad held it together and helped me move forward. My parent’s called my therapist, who told us about Phoenix House’s IMPACT Program and said I should go in immediately. Less than two weeks later, I was in outpatient treatment.

“IMPACT is at Phoenix House’s Jack Aron Center on the Upper West Side, and it saved my life. I loved my group, but for the first few weeks, I kept relapsing and failing the drug tests. I knew it was wrong but I kept saying ‘I need to get into college, so I need to get good grades, so I need to do coke.’ It’s crazy how one’s brain works and how one’s thought process gets altered with addiction. I remember thinking, ‘Well, they’re already pulling me out of the school early to come to outpatient treatment, so now I definitely need to keep doing coke so I can keep up with my classes.’

“About four weeks into treatment I stopped relapsing. I began to realize there were bigger reasons for stopping and getting

clean that I had to confront. My little brother is probably the reason that pushed me the most to try and stay clean. He's nine years younger than me, so when I was in treatment he was about seven...I knew I had to do a better job, and today I know I'm being the big sister he deserves. Someone he can look up to and count on.

“Recovery was a long road and every step was worth it... I've been clean since 2007.

“...I graduated high school and then went on to college, graduating from the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in Advertising and Graphic Design. Today I work at an ad agency in NYC. I've art directed numerous ad campaigns, music videos, and even a commercial featuring Jay-Z. I've also discovered my love for film; I just wrote and directed my first short film, which is off to festivals now. My dream is to win an Oscar for directing and to just keep on truckin' through life and remembering to choose happiness and to overcome hard obstacles. I still keep in touch with my counselor from Phoenix House, as well as a bunch of people from my group. So many of them are doing really well; one guy became a chef, another is working at a treatment center helping teenagers. We had a really nice group, and it was great to be able to find recovery together.

“Being an addict has shaped who I've become. If you're an addict, you can overcome your addiction and channel all that power into something creative or ambitious, and that achievement and power equip you to go very far in life. Few people understand how scary and difficult it is to fight addiction, but the good news is that it's totally possible, and you'll come out of it as a much stronger person.”

Carrie finds long-term sobriety by becoming more involved in her recovery group

After Carrie's dad gave her the ultimatum of staying sober, living in a paid-for apartment or being homeless, Carrie managed to stay sober a couple of weeks but knew that it wouldn't last long if she didn't reach out for help. She called someone who she knew was sober—someone who had tried to get her clean before, but without success—a woman named Margot, and told her she was ready to quit.

Carrie started to accompany Margot to her recovery group meetings. Carrie followed every instruction Margot had for her and kept herself as involved as possible in recovery meetings. Carrie would arrive early to set up chairs and make coffee.

“I greeted people at the door and gave out my number to those women who were coming into recovery with even less clean time than me. I would call them and listen—if selfishness was my problem, compassion would be my solution.”

“I felt like I was 13 again, the person I was before I started using. I had to relearn everything—how to eat, how to sit at a table, how to have conversations without interrupting, how to speak without swearing. I slowly started to come back to life... My feet felt lighter. I was excited to go to sleep at night because it brought me eight hours closer to waking up again.

“Gone were the crippling paranoia, the self-loathing, the destructive impulses that had plagued me all my life. The LCBO seemed like a foggy memory, a distant place I used to go to for stuff I no longer wanted.

“Along the way I made amends to my family. It was a brutal experience—I can’t imagine the sleepless nights I caused my parents and siblings during my teens and 20s. To them, it was as though an alien had abducted me when I was 14 and never brought me back. Most of my relatives accepted my apologies and were relieved and excited to see how much I’d changed. Now I have a great relationship with my parents. But to some of my family members, I’ll always be a drug addict.”

A year and a half into her sobriety, Carrie applied to law school, using her struggle with addiction as an inspiring topic for her entrance essay.

“During law school, I was open about my addiction, and people were curious but kind and encouraging. I was able to demonstrate to myself and others that someone can live in recovery and still have a gratifying professional and personal life.

“While [attending law school], I met a hilarious, thoughtful man at a recovery meeting named Colin Hubley. We quickly fell in love. We married on August 20, 2014, and, nine months ago, I gave birth to our daughter, Nolah. She is the happiest baby I’ve ever seen. Colin and I spend our free time walking our dog, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, having dinner with our families and seeing our close friends, all of whom are in recovery.”

Carrie says she lost a lot of friends in the recovery process; they were the ones who couldn’t give up cocaine. Three of Jamie’s close friends have died from drug or alcohol overdoses. One time, she even ran into an ex-boyfriend who

was now panhandling at the corner of the street in order to fund his next high.

“Last year, I finished law school and secured an articling position at a firm that specializes in social justice and advocacy work. My employer is not just accepting of my past but supportive of my decision to write about it. I want to go into criminal law. It won’t be easy or particularly lucrative, but everybody deserves a second chance. And a third, and a fourth. I believe that with a lot of work, anyone can turn their life around. Even me.”